

# Living in the Upside Down

The spell seems to be breaking at last, but as recent events show, there's still a long way to go.

By Kathleen Hayes

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In 2016, the tv show “Stranger Things” introduced a world that looks much like our own, but where the forces of good are continually confounded. In the Upside Down, everything is the opposite of what it should be. Jews, especially after October 7, have often turned to this imagined hellscape to describe our world. Genocidal butchers and rapists are hailed by Ivy League students and professors, while the killers’ victims and opponents are called rapists and baby-killers. Virtue and vice, victim and villain: everything is turned inside-out. And the truly crazymaking thing is that only a few—those on the outside who witness the Upside Down—know that it’s upside down.

I have yet another sense of living in the Upside Down. In it, women and girls are routinely denied rights, opportunities and dignity, or be branded as bigots. Lesbians are bullied to accept men as sexual partners, in the name of progress. Young people describe doctors who encouraged them to remove healthy body parts when they were unhappy children—procedures they now bitterly regret—and are deluged with hate messages. Parents’ hearts are broken, their children estranged or their custody denied, the parents’ grief sneered at. Men, supported by many women, howl to murder, rape and decapitate feminists. Meanwhile the people responsible for this pain are celebrated in media, schools, progressive churches and synagogues, and a seemingly never-ending parade.

This is the Upside Down of “transgenderism.” It is so fully entrenched that I know many people will not be able to understand me, and that if I write about it too passionately, their hearts and minds will close. They are utterly convinced that “support trans rights” is the only attitude for a compassionate person to take, and that any discordant voice must be that of a bigot. So I present a recent state news story.

On April 30, California senators considered a bill concerning “transwomen” serving their sentences in women’s prisons. Supporters of “trans rights” likely envision these inmates as something like Laverne Cox: a highly feminized, clearly harmless person who just wants to be treated like one of the girls. This is not the reality. For years, California has transferred inmates from men’s to women’s prisons who take no hormones and have had no surgery; their bodies are unambiguously male. Supporters of the policy say these inmates face terrible violence in men’s prisons, which is

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come by making women unsafe.

The bill, SB 311, called to “establish a secure facility at each women’s prison to house transgender women, in order to protect the security needs of biological women.” The inmates could participate in the women’s work and recreational prison activities; they simply couldn’t share their sleeping quarters and showers. It also called to exclude inmates convicted of sexual offenses, including rape, child molestation and forced oral copulation, from being housed in women’s prison.

In the hearing to consider the bill, the sponsoring senator, Shannon Grove, reported having received many letters from female inmates begging for help. Last August, one such letter arrived from an incarcerated woman saying a “transgender” inmate raped her and assaulted her friend. Enclosed was an object supplied by the state of California to help women respond to the inmate in the next bunk bed: a condom.

Grove read from a stack of letters testifying to being punched, kicked and sexually assaulted by “transgender” inmates. The women reported being forced to share a tiny cell with large, fully intact males, making them, one wrote, “extremely fearful and depressed.” Eighty-five percent of incarcerated women experienced some form of sexual abuse in their prior lives. Now in prison, they experience the constant threat of it recurring.

Former California women’s prison inmates, including Amie Ichikawa, founder of advocacy group Woman II Woman, asked the committee to use their power to “extend human rights to the entire incarcerated female population.” Another former inmate, Tiasha Croslin, testified that in 2012 a “transgender” inmate convicted of rape, assault and electrocuting a mother and daughter was transferred to her prison, and immediately requested a job as an electrician. Croslin and her friends felt devastated, terrified and helpless. “Women’s lives are at stake, and just because they’re incarcerated, it doesn’t mean their lives don’t matter,” Croslin said. She urged the committee to vote yes.

The Democratic senators voted it down. Leading the opposition, Senator Scott Wiener of San Francisco claimed that the majority of sexual violence in prison is committed by staff, and that the bill is part of “a national poll-tested culture war targeting trans people, dehumanizing them, falsely depicting them as predators and fakers.” Nationwide, opponents of trans rights are “trying to deny them access to healthcare, trying to deny them access to public spaces.” Trump’s election, Wiener continued, “poured lighter fluid” over this crusade against trans people—“this tiny population who’re just

risk of violence in all aspects of society.”

It sounds so compelling—much as “support the Palestinians” sounds righteous until you look below the surface. Because Wiener’s narrative—of a vulnerable community attacked for no reason but bigotry—doesn’t withstand scrutiny. Prejudice against people identifying as “trans” certainly exists, but—to take Wiener’s healthcare example—no laws are being passed to prevent them seeing a doctor for flu symptoms. What legislators are challenging is the wisdom and morality of prescribing irreversible cross-sex hormones and surgeries to teenagers.

Similarly, no one is trying to “erase trans people” by denying them the right to participate in sports. What recent laws, including Trump’s executive orders, are trying to stop is the grotesque, ongoing spectacle of obviously-male swimmers and runners creaming their competitors in the women’s category. And for all the talk of “compassion,” where is it for such female athletes, or California’s incarcerated women?

It’s necessary to say it, because it is true: The human species is comprised of two sexes, male and female. Only women can get pregnant, while men are almost invariably larger and stronger than women. There are countless ways of being a man or a woman, meaning our society offers plenty of latitude to dress, play, work and pursue romantic relationships as one wishes, but people cannot escape the sex they were born as—and certainly not by checking a box on a government form. Denying these obvious facts has had incredibly harmful repercussions to women and girls, lesbians and gays, loving parents, and the mostly-young people being offered a dangerous panacea for their pain. But ultimately it infects all society, because it orders us to lie about what we see with our own eyes.

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Those who call this a niche “culture war” issue couldn’t be more wrong. No reality is more fundamental than the distinction between men and women. We know it exists from the moment we emerge from our mothers’ wombs, continues to the first time we’re held in our fathers’ arms, and segues seamlessly to every human being we encounter.



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trans women are women, trans men are men—and we weren't allowed to talk about it. Only a few courageous souls, like Abigail Shrier, did. Five years ago, in her book "Irreversible Damage," Shrier exposed the harm "transgenderism" was doing to girls. She was vilified and partially canceled—although her book was a godsend to many.

The spell seems to be breaking at last, but as recent events show, there's still a long way to go. For those of us who have been too quiet, now's the time to speak up. For everyone else, it's time to ask what kind of human rights campaign is built on claims you know to be untrue.

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